



HOLY FAMILY
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Help for those Tired, Aching Soles

Ps. 4:2 Answer when I call, my saving God. In my troubles, you cleared a way; show me your favor; hear my prayer.

Nearly 40 percent of Americans have suffered from heel pain, according to the American Podiatric Medical Association. It's easy to see why: Feet withstand the equivalent of 120 tons of pressure for every mile walked. Plantar fasciitis is the most common cause of such pain, but a lesser-known - and more easily treatable - condition called heel pad atrophy might also be to blame. Plantar fasciitis is caused by inflammation of the fascia, the tough tissue that wraps around your heel, extends forward to the base of the toes, and cushions every step. The inflammation occurs when there's excessive stretching at the point where the fascia attaches to the heel bone. There's also a thick wedge of fat in each heel that works like a shock absorber. It can wear down over time, a process known as heel pad atrophy. While both conditions make you feel like you are walking on rocks, "heel pad atrophy and plantar fasciitis aren't tough diagnoses," says Judy Baumhauer, M.D.M.P.H. The following information can help you diagnose your pain and find ways to treat it.

When does it hurt? If you have plantar fasciitis, the pain is most severe when you take a step after being off your feet, such as when you get out of bed or stand up after prolonged sitting. Once on your feet, the fascia stretches and the pain usually subsides. Heel pad atrophy becomes more painful the more you walk or place weight on your heel, and is better when the heel is cushioned.

Where does it hurt? "Plantar fasciitis hurts more towards the inside of your foot, around the heel, while pad atrophy is focused in the center of the heel." People with atrophy often feel intense pain if they push on the foot's center. In addition to the fat pad under heel, there is another beneath the ball of your foot. It can also wear down and cause pain, but that mostly occurs in women who wear high heels.

Why does it happen? The heel fat pad simply wears down with aging. If you have had a cortisone shot or sustained trauma (such as a heel fracture), it can lead to bleeding into the structure, which can cause atrophy, and make it lose its resiliency. Plantar fasciitis is more complex. It can be caused by a number of factors, including weight gain, worn-out shoes, walking barefoot, and increased exercise. Severe heel pain after vigorous athletics could indicate a rupture of the plantar fascia.

What can you do about it? Plantar fasciitis will usually go away in less than a year if you avoid the activities that irritate the area. "The tissue naturally stretches out and becomes more supple over time, allowing for the inflammation to subside. Placing cushioned arch supports in your shoes can speed up the healing process and help avoid recurrence of the condition. Icing the area and using anti-inflammatory drugs can help, too. Most important is doing stretching exercises. You should consult your physician or physical therapist for the proper way to do these exercises.

Easing heel pad atrophy is easier: Place a gel-type heel cushion (or full-foot gel pad if the pain is centered on the ball of your foot) in each of your shoes. "The pain should quickly go away." "Don't be bamboozled by doctors wanting to inject fat into your heels." There is no science behind it, and that fat just gets reabsorbed. As always, if there is severe trauma or persistent pain, consult your physician for advice and further treatment.

The information for this article is from: Medicine Matters, Consumer Reports on Health, November 2011. Quotes in this article and information for this article were written by: Judy Baumhauer, M.D.M.P.H. president for the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society.

Wishing you not many April Showers in your life, but many May flowers, Your Parish Nurse.

**To contact Holy Family Parish Nurse Ministry call 330-688-6412 ext. 462
or view at www.holyfamilystow.org.**